

Introduction

On March 9, Daylight Savings Time begins again and we set our clocks ahead one hour. That reminds me of a letter that a backwoods Louisiana woman wrote to the federal government. She objected bitterly to the change and explained why, ***"That extra hour of sunshine done burnt up all my tomaters."***

Actually, it would be nice to have an extra hour in the day wouldn't it? I talked to my son Aaron on the phone last Sunday. I asked him how things were going and he jokingly replied that he's still waiting for God to answer his prayer. Puzzled, I inquired what that prayer was and he told me, ***"Six more hours in the day."***

All of us want enough time and the good news is we can have it. It obviously isn't by getting more time but by making the most of the time that we already have. Turn to Ephesians 5:15-16 and that's what I'm going to preach about today – making the most of our time.

Make the Most of Our Time

In 5:1-14, Paul calls us to be children of light who walk in love. Then, in 5:15, he declares that those who are that live wisely, that is, in the will of God. Part of what it means to live wisely is found in verse 16. Children of light make the most of their time. The *Tyndale New Testament Commentary* on Ephesians explains what the Greek word translated "make the most of" means. It means "use to the full." We should use our time to the full.

All of us are equals when it comes to time aren't we? Some people have more intelligence, talent, beauty, and wealth than the rest of us do. But there's one thing that all of us have equally – time. All of us get precisely 24 hours, 1440 minutes, 86,400 seconds, in each of the days of our lives. None of us get any more or less than that.

That implies something that all of us need to grasp. We can't get more time. God isn't going to give my son Aaron or any of us six more

hours in our day. We can't get more time. But we can use the time we already have more wisely and that's exactly what Paul's calling us to do here. Make the most of our time. Use it to the full.

Doing that requires three things of us, each of which I want to explain to you.

Treasure Time

First, we must *treasure* time!

Unfortunately, most people don't. The problem is what they think about it. It's a fundamental trait of human nature. People tend to trivialize what they think is plentiful. Well, most people think that time is plentiful, that it's abundant and free, and trivialize it because they do.

But that's a mistake because it isn't plentiful. It's scarce instead.

A priority management firm conducted a survey of 6000 people. The survey's purpose was to determine what people spend their time doing. The results were startling. Over his or her lifetime, the typical American spends six months waiting at stoplights, 8 months opening junk mail, 1 year looking for misplaced objects, 2 years unsuccessfully returning phone calls, 4 years doing housework of one kind or another, 5 years waiting in lines, 6 years eating, and 22 years sleeping.

Let's do some calculations. Add all of those numbers together and we get approximately 41 years. Now subtract that from the basic 75-year lifespan and we have 34 years left. That's how much time that you and I have to work with – 34 years. That isn't very much is it?

My point is this. The time that we have on earth isn't plentiful. It's scarce. It isn't something that we have a lot of. It's something that we have a little of.

So, we should treasure it! When Queen Elizabeth was on her deathbed, she had 10,000 dresses in her wardrobe, a fortune in her treasury, and an entire kingdom to rule. Yet, she cried out in distress, ***"All my treasures for an inch of time."*** Knowing that her time was scarce, she treasured it. And so should we.

We won't waste it if we do. Dr. W.E. Sangster was a familiar friend of Jesus. His son wrote a book about him and the secrets of his success after he died. One of those secrets was and I quote the book: ***"The difference between one minute and two was of considerable consequence to him. Time was never wasted."*** Notice the causal connection there between time being ***"of considerable consequence to him"*** and the fact that he ***"never wasted"*** it. The lesson is valuable and clear. Let's treasure time. We won't waste it if we do.

Did you ever stop and consider how much time most of us waste. A book titled *The Time Trap* came up with a list of the most common time wasters. They are the following: attempting too much at once, unrealistic time estimates, procrastinating, lack of specific priorities, failure to listen well, doing it myself – failure to delegate, unable to say "no," perfectionism – focusing on needless details, lack of organization, failure to write it down, reluctance to get started, absence of self-appointed deadlines, and not doing first things first.

I don't know about you but I can relate to several of those, especially lack of organization, focusing on needless details, and failure to write it down. But I suspect that all of you can too – relate to some of them. The fact is that all of us have time wasters in our lives.

But if we treasure time, we'll try to eliminate them. We'll identify what they are and then act constructively to get rid of them. We'll make the concerted effort not to waste time.

That's what I'm trying to do as a disciple of Jesus. This ball hat illustrates exactly what I mean. I can't tell you how much time I've wasted looking for it the last five years. It's been a lot though. So one of my New Year's resolutions was to get organized and always put it in the same place whenever I took it off. I don't want to waste any more time looking for it. What I'm doing with my ball hat, I'm doing with all of the other time wasters in my life. I'm trying to eliminate them one by one from it.

And so should you. Treasure time and you will.

Seize Time

So that's the first thing that making the most of our time requires of us. We must treasure it and thus not waste it. The second thing it requires of us is to seize it. We must seize the time we have.

We've all heard people talk about time slipping away. Well, that happens constantly in the ordinary circumstances of our lives. We have a whole lot more down time in them than most of us realize.

Some of that down time is peculiar to our own life situations. I make many hospital calls for instance and have a lot of down time waiting in the hallway while doctors or nurses tend to the patients.

But a great deal of down time is common to us all. Let's go back to the survey that I mentioned earlier. Believe it or not, the average person spends 6 months of his or her life waiting at stoplights and 5 years waiting in lines. Can you imagine that? That's a lot of down time isn't it? 6 months at stoplights and 5 years in lines.

But it doesn't necessarily have to be. Don't let time slip away from you in those ordinary circumstances of life. Seize it instead. Be creative and use it as constructively and beneficially as you can.

I've talked about waiting at stoplights and in lines. But what about waiting for wives to get dressed? Husbands, how much time do you suppose you'll spend doing that before you die? If it's a lot, you'll appreciate what a 17th century Chancellor of France named Henri D'Aguesseau did. He actually wrote a multi-volume set of learned books while waiting for his wife to dress for dinner. Not all at once of course but over the years. He wrote each time he had to wait for her and was actually able to complete that large multi-volume set by doing so. He didn't just let time slip away in other words. He seized it instead.

And so should we. We do need to be creative on a case-by-case basis. I always have my sermon manuscript in my pocket, for instance, and go over it when I'm waiting to see patients at the hospital. But there's one thing that we can almost always do no matter what the down time is. We can pray. Take that 5 years waiting in lines for instance.

There is something useful we can do. Pray for the people in front and back of us and beside us or for anyone else that God brings to mind. I have a list of 12 mentally ill people that I pray for. I have made the commitment to pray for at least one of those every time I'm waiting in line at a store. Imagine the good that would be done if we turned the 5 years of waiting into 5 five years of praying.

However we do it, we need to do it. Seize time.

Prioritize Time

There's a third thing that making the most of our time requires of us. Prioritize it. That means that we devote to activities and things the time that their value deserves – no more and no less.

I admit that isn't an easy thing to do. Paul explains why in the last line in verse 16, "***because the days are evil.***" He was observing that first century culture pressured people into the misuse of their time.

But that's nothing compared to the pressure we face today. The pressure to misuse time is greater in American culture today than in any other culture at any other time in history. Social commentator Ken Myers explains why that is so in his book *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes*. He writes: "***Modern popular culture is not just the latest in a series of diversions. It is rather a culture of diversion.***"

He's right. Our culture, like no other in history, is a culture of diversion. It offers countless exciting but trivial pursuits upon which people are frittering away their lives. The amount of time that Americans spend watching television, playing computer and video games, shopping on the internet, building their bodies, and so on is staggering.

Well, our call is to overcome the culture's pressure and to prioritize our time. It's to give activities and things only that time that their value deserves. Doing that is a two-step process. First, we determine the inherent value of the activities and things. Determining that requires Biblically informed reflection and thought. Suppose that we have 10 hours a week, for instance, to devote to Bible study and entertainment.

Both are needs we have. Both have inherent value to God and us. So, we calculate what that value is. The first step is to determine the inherent value of activities and things. The second step is then to spend the amount of time on them that their value deserves. So, we give to Bible study and entertainment that part of the 10 hours that their value dictates we should.

That second step is a matter of intent. Time for activities and things isn't something that we have. It's something that we take - based on how much we value them. That is a critical insight. There's something that all of us have said probably hundreds of times in our lives, ***"I don't have the time for this or that."*** Do you realize that is never true? It's literally never true that we don't *have the time* for something. What is true is that we won't *take the time* for something. We always have time for the activities and things that are most important to us. And if we don't have it, we take it, which means this. When we say that we don't have the time for something, what we really mean is it isn't important enough to us to take the time for.

That is a fact of life and its ultimate application is to discipleship to Jesus. Why is it that so many professed followers of Jesus don't have the time to be with Him and to learn and do all that He says? If they're like I was for many years, it's simply because they have better, more important, things to do - or so they think. Objectively, discipleship to Jesus is first in life. So, let's "take" the time for it. The great old hymn says it well: ***"Take time to be holy."***

Conclusion

I close with some calculations: 148,920 hours, 8,935,200 minutes, and 536,112,000 seconds. That's how much time I have left on earth if I live a normal lifespan. How much time do you have left? Whatever that is, live wisely and do what Paul says in Ephesians 5:16. Make the most of it. That means treasure it, seize it, and prioritize it. You'll have enough of it if you do!